

## *Banquet #1*

H. shuffles from one side of the room to the other, careful, like a magician organizing the deck.

The others seem only to swab it. Much is asked of their necks, these others, as they survey the room by use of its mirrors,

avoid the gazes of diners in the midst of their dinners, take a survey of jowls, jaws, and jades of all shades hanging low, slack as ever from the skid of the faces, in which is made plain the high mood of the evening.

All present are of the sad type, she confirms, turning back to the center of the room, still with a sip in her glass and something else in her eye she makes a note to play for a tear if she's called upon for comment in the next couple minutes.

They yammer, these others, with the hubris of a species that just at last reached its own moon and now studies its dust. Pert on champagne, she chases a bug and admits to herself all of what is to come may be true. What a waste!

She has broken her wrist at play in the gardens, but luckily not of her dominant hand, in a moment of drinkingly shoving the butler at an angle not explained well enough to herself at that moment. And before she yowled, breaking the calm on the banks of the river, where tide pools were filling, she said a quick sorry to that poor old slob. "Don't think of me," are the words before that she last spoke to a man.

Inside the walls, the Service wait to clear course. Weeks later, the lucky ones among them will wade through these halls with their pants rolled at the ankles and their shoes at their shoulders carrying what they can through the holes in the walls.

Until then they're in a room so small that to leave requires others to stand. Former artists and mages culled from the slums of that land. Their employers enjoy now a joke as to what was discovered last month among the contents of a portfolio on the court-chartered bus.

Before he was behanded and his life's work fully rent, H. snuck a look at the youth's fateful sketch. It was not exactly her interest, and it wouldn't be right to insist, but she took his drawing of her nude more for a drawing of her bed.

*During a pause*

“As long as we’re stopped, would someone get up there and take down the wind?

- and the glare on the head of the man at 11?
- While you’re there may as well level that frame.
- But keep the sweat in his eyes.
- And rough up his shirt.
- Add a stroke to the pattern that’s formed in the plate.
- Let it look like he’s taken a bite from each side of the steak.
- Keep the glass that full but no more.
- How do you feel? Just a few feelings longer.
- That second stride should be more of a saunter and the next-to-last look is really a leer.
- There’s a smudge on the page there, I think it’s meant to say “glare.”
- And tousle his hair. A little less, little more.
- He’s just woken up, doesn’t know where he is.
- Why’s the wax on the cloth? It should be on the floor.
- Think less like a dream and more of a vision.

The man on the ladder brought his coffee up with him and whistled for Skipper to come with some sugar.

- Is the pattern too busy in the fold of her collar?
- Switch the whole lady out, I’d rather another.

The sugar appeared but he need not have bothered. The coffee was sweet from the effort involved. Skipper descended, clocked out, and then left. The train home at that hour was crowded as a mouth.